6: Goudal--174 [2] S-3 (1934) 1938 Laotians
116, 463, 511

"In Laos, indigenous industries are very little developed, for the needs of the inhabitants are very slight. With few exceptions, there are no workers engaged in any given trade connected with the building of houses, the manufacture of utensils, the making of hunting and fishing gear or of spinning equipment, the dyeing or weaving of materials, or any other activity connected with housing, furniture, clothing, household articles, etc."

10: d'Orleans--307 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 461, 463, 511, 556

[LSS: at Luang Prabang] "The men do but little work, labour in the mines and the cultivation of the soil being left to the Kas and it is only in the towns that they are found engaging in any artistic occupation, such as the making of jewellery or the chasing of silver. Even those who do work rarely do so for more than seven hours a day, and the woman keep the pot boiling by spinning silk and making various materials, though they do not overwork themselves. When a household is very hard pressed the men seek employment as boatmen, and are very expert, making enough in a month or two to keep them the rest of the year, so that if there are few large fortunes, most of the inhabitants have enough to live upon in comfort, preferring freedom and tranquillity to an excess of labour, which would only give them what they do not want. Moreover, when they do happen to have put by a decent sum of money, they go and spend it at the pagoda, either in fulfilment of a vow or in payment of some religious ceremony. This is their only luxury, nor, indeed, do they regard it as one, for they reckon upon profiting by it in another world."

10: d'Orleans--316 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 175, 197, 241, 511, 563 Ethnic subgroups

"In speaking of the inhabitants of the principality of Luang Prabang, I referred to the Lus, the Meos and the Chinese, and a few words must be said about all three.

The first mentioned strike me as being, from an ethnographical point of view, very similar to the Laotians, whose language they speak, with a few slight differences of dialect, but they are smaller, punier and in a more poverty-stricken state. We saw one of their villages, just behind Luang Prabang, and its poverty was the most salient feature about it. Coming originally from Sibsompanas, where they form the principal element of the population, they have been driven south by Chinese wars and invasions, and several of them told me that they had not the means of returning home. Moreover, they are just as well off where they are, for, like the Kas, they cultivate the soil, planting rice fields for the Laotians."

23; Franck--332 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 511, 609 Ethnic subgroup

"The Kha villages I saw were the lowest type of human dwelling; filth and stupidity seemed to be the prevailing characteristics. All our romantic yarns about the simple life of savages leave us with the false impression that they are hardier than civilized people, and the writers rarely mention the dirty, the truly animal conditions in which they live. The Kha are as innocent of any idea of cleanliness as the lowest class of Chinese, in great contrast to the Tai about them, and it is not strange that they have more smallpox than the rest of the population. Some were so timid that I had to drive them out of their reed and grass huts into the light necessary for photography, just as one might drive some wild animal out of its warm but dirty lair, so timid that I had to manhandle a group of both sexes that came along the trail one day, before they gave up their temptation to run away without posing for my dreaded camera."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

slaughterers are obliged to work by flares, which is responsible, the French think, for an unusually picturesque effect. It is 'not done' to go along while the actual killing is in progress, but shortly after, when the carcasses are suspended from hooks to be cut up, and the workers, stripped to their loincloths, and garishly splashed, paddle about in a vermilion sea. Cars are stationed just beyond the reach of the steaming odours, and one is recommended to see the thing as one views a nude in a picture gallery – that is, divorced from all but a disinterested abstraction, in this case the colour.

The possibilities of Vientiane, it was clear, would be quickly exhausted. Thao Nhouy, the Laotian Minister of Education, lent me his jeep to see some of the surrounding villages, but the roads were so appalling that it broke down after being driven for about five miles. He then suggested that I might like to see the local schoolgirls dancing, and when I said that I would be delighted, and asked for permission to take photographs, the girls were sent off home, on their bicycles, to get their best clothes. An hour or two later they began to trickle back, wearing their mothers' jewellery as well as their own and with their silk finery done up in paper parcels. When they had dressed and were ready they made a glittering sight. One girl wore a scarf ornamented with real gold thread said to be worth about £50 in English money. They danced under the supervision of a teacher whom I recognized as a professional actor, from the *boun*,[1] and who occasionally intervened when a girl failed in some minor feat, such as bending her fingers back at an expressive ninety degrees from the palm.

All these girls, dressed as they were like princesses, came from shacks in the forest. Each one had a bicycle – infallibly fitted with dynamo lighting, and sometimes 3-speed gears. It seems that a bicycle for his daughter is one of the essentials for which a Laotian will work. It is considered ill-bred and irreligious in Laos to work more than is necessary. The father of a family cultivates an amount of land, estimated, by a bonze who is expert in such matters, to be

[1] [i.e., Laotian religious festival. --Analyst]

253 825 292 301 535 493 511 241 461 511 792 255

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

sufficient for his requirements. If there are six members of the family, six standard, equal sized portions of land will be cultivated. If a child is born into the family another piece of land is cleared and worked. When a member of the family dies, whether it be a baby or the grandfather, cultivation of his portion will be stopped. Just enough is produced for the family to eat and to provide a small surplus sold in the market – *with the bonze's approval* – to buy occasional strict necessities, like a silk shawl and a bicycle for the daughter. There is no social insurance and there are no poor. The old and the sick are supported by the young, or, where they are left without able-bodied providers, by the community, and the bonzes give instructions for the necessary land to be placed under cultivation for them. The accumulation of wealth which is not to be used for definite, approved purposes, causes a man to lose prestige among his neighbours, just, as in the West, the process is reversed. The main difference, it seems, between Buddhism in Indo-China, and Christianity – apart from any question as to their relative merits – is that, whether we admire it or not, the former is largely put into practice.

It is a stimulating reflection that the Western millionaire, obsessed for the sake of social distinction with the amassing of enormous possessions – little of which he can personally consume – would attain the same ends of personal celebrity under a Laotian Buddhistic order of things by his priestly austerities – by embracing the most abject and prestige-conferring form of poverty.

For this reason perhaps the local Evangelist missionary and his wife have made no converts. Like all who have lived among the Laotians they are charmed with them – although, of course, disappointed at their blindness. They also deplore their immorality.

In the matter of converts the Evangelists have been no more unsuccessful than their Portuguese, Spanish and French forerunners. The Laotians having little capacity for abstractions, either in their

caught even on the other side of the watershed and then delivered as slaves to the Burmese, Siamese, Cambodian and Laotian merchants of the low country. The barbarity of their mores has been greatly lessened since our arrival in Laos, but traces of it still exist and manifest themselves in rivalries and attacks between tribes. The police force which [260] we have organized in the land in the form of a native militia, the influence of the missionaries who have settled among the turbulent Khas, and also the help and example of the tribes which have submitted to our tutelary authority will soon cause this abnormal state of things to disappear. Finally, our increasingly effective occupation of the land, which has been completed by the organization of the province of Darlac, and the strict protectorate which we exercise over Cambodia, the chief purchaser of slaves, have begun to bring order in an effective fashion to this shameful traffic in human flesh (1).

(1) See § I of Chapter XI.

It should be noted that the Djarais and the Rades are the only Khas who speak Cham, that is to say a greatly corrupted Malay tongue which they have preserved for centuries.

The men's clothing consists of a loin-cloth, and that of the women consists only of a short skirt knotted around the waist or under the armpits, the torso left bare.

Both men and women have long hair wound in a coil. Both sexes, but mainly the men, wear jewels of a crude shape, made of tin or brass, in the form of bracelets, neckbands, ear pendants or cylinders and hairpins. They are also very fond of glass bead necklaces.

These Khas smoke tobacco, either dried or green, as well as bamboo shavings impregnated with nicotine. They make terra cotta pipes with highly worked bowls and also use imported brass pipes. They do not blacken their teeth.

From the point of view of diet and housing, practically the same conditions obtain as we have seen above except that the houses are built with greater care and arranged in the form of a circular camp.

In the middle of Cedang and Rognao villages there is a large house some twenty to thirty meters long by twelve to fifteen meters wide, with a high pointed roof. This is the common house where all the boys of the locality live from the age of nine or ten until the day of their marriage.

Se-Bang-Fai. But studies are not yet sufficiently advanced for us to be able to give any useful information. 316

We have nevertheless felt that we should mention these deposits, in order to establish the importance of all this part of Laos from the point of view of mineral wealth.

[327] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER VII

I

SCAVENGING

We have seen that the inhabitants of Laos are apathetic and little inclined to work. They nevertheless find, although they go to scarcely any trouble, enough to supply their needs easily. 461 241

Indeed, with the exception of a few annual crops such as tobacco, cotton and indigo which are grown on the ever-renewed alluvia of the watercourses, the production of rice and of maize are the only occupations which require--and even then during a relatively short time--any degree of work or perseverance. We may mention the opium poppy, ramie, hemp and the mulberry tree merely as a reminder, for only a small part of the population devotes its time to these crops, which are still not at all extensive. [249]

Yet, it may be objected, the native has an easy life, dresses adequately, [328] lives in a house which is solid and comfortable from his point of view, has various tools and utensils, weapons, and sometimes even valuable cloth goods, jewels, etc. He spends money for celebrations and for offerings to the bonzes and pagodas. He pays taxes, he supports court costs which are often large with respect to the question at issue, and he is subject to the exactions of his mandarins to a greater or less degree. Finally, the commercial transactions of Laos involve quantities and sums which are quite high in comparison to the sparse population. 511 [438]

How are we to reconcile all these factors, and how is it that the Laotian, who produces so little with his labor, nevertheless has all he needs to get along on?

This is due to the fact that Laos is above all else a scavenging country. 314